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ABSTRACT

This case study describes a 7-year-old boy with severe emotional difficulties but also capable of demonstrating highly gifted behavior. The study involved a review of related literature, and participant and non-participant observation as well as teacher and subject interviews. The case is described in terms of family background, previous school experiences, and the child's school experiences. Noted is the great variation in the child's academic performance depending on his psychological condition. (19 references) (DB)

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Double-Labelling: A Case Study of Emotionally Disordered Gifted Students

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Running Head: DOUBLE-LABELLING: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The difficulty and importance of identifying students with two very different sets of needs is shown through the case study of a seven-year-old boy. Through participant and non-participant observations, and interviews with both the subject and his teachers, this first grader's potential for academic success peeks out from behind his mask of emotional and behavioral problems. Research reveals the obstacles these students encounter in schools and offers some suggestions for the parents and teachers of these special students.

Double-Labelling:
A Case Study of Emotionally Disordered Gifted Students

Comparatively little research has been done to date on the emotionally or behaviorally disordered gifted child. Yet there are children who are identified as gifted who have emotional problems that are undetected, and children who are identified as emotionally or behaviorally disordered whose gifted potential goes unnoticed. In a society that values education so highly, there are children whose needs are not met because teachers, administrators, and parents have not thought to look at the possibility that a child may have two very different set of needs (Betts & Niehart, 1988).

This study will examine one example of a student with emotional and behavioral problems who might also be gifted. By observing this child in his classroom and school, by talking with him and his teachers, I hope to provide guidance for regular classroom teachers in identifying giftedness[1] in a student who is

emotionally disordered[2]. It may be that the student in question is not gifted, or at least does not qualify for a gifted label by district or state guidelines and criteria. However, it will still be important for teachers to recognize the strengths of this child and to work on developing those strengths while dealing with his emotional problems.

Review of Related Literature

Contrary to the beliefs of many people in the early part of this century, longitudinal studies done by Terman (1925) provided evidence that children of high intellectual ability do not have more problems with emotional adjustment than do their age peers. Terman followed one-thousand-five-hundred children for thirty-five years to study what happened to gifted children as they aged. He was hoping to disprove the "early ripe, early rot" conception that historically pervaded beliefs about gifted children (McIntire, 1992).

Children with such advanced abilities were believed to deteriorate earlier than children with more "normal" abilities. Terman found no early detioration in his studies of the gifted.

Yet, there are some problems with Terman's work. Students who were part of his gifted group were selected by their teachers for being the "most intelligent" (McIntire, 1992). Students who may have been emotionally or behaviorally disordered were not likely to be identified by their teachers (Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan, 1982). This does not mean that Terman's findings are insignificant. The students in his study were gifted and were found to be emotionally stable. However, his study cannot provide insight into how likely it is that gifted students are emotionally stable. For this we must look to his successors and their subsequent findings.

Others (Hollingworth, 1942; Ford, 1989) have agreed with Terman that high ability students do exhibit overall emotional stability when compared with age peers. But, some believe that gifted students are

particularly vulnerable to emotional stresses in their lives (Hollingworth, 1942; Gowan, 1957) because of their heightened sensitivity (Freeman, 1983) to people (Whitmore, 1980) and things around them. Being gifted provides more opportunities for emotional maladjustments to occur. Hollingworth (1942) states, "These problems of adjustment do not arise unless a child is gifted intellectually" (p.282). She goes on to say, "To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties" (p.282).

It would be difficult to discuss emotional or behavioral disorders and giftedness without mentioning their relationship with underachievement. Whitmore (1986) noted that underachieving gifted students exhibited such behavioral problems as acute withdrawal, aggressiveness, disruptive and attention-seeking behaviors, avoidance behaviors, hyperactivity, unusual fears and phobias, all of which are characteristics of emotionally or behaviorally disordered students. Dowdall and Colangelo (1982) also found that

underachievers are more likely to exhibit social immaturity and emotional problems than are their achieving counterparts. Gowan (1957) believes that emotional factors are a primary cause of underachievement. He states, "of those who go [to college], almost 30 percent fail to attain significant achievement in scholarship because of emotional.... problems" (p. 98). Supplee's (1990) work also suggests the possibility that emotional factors may be a cause, primary or secondary, of underachievement. She cites Whitmore's design for meeting the needs of highly gifted students "who evidenced need of an intensive program of social and emotional rehabilitation as well as academic remediation" (p. 20). Bricklin and Bricklin (as cited in Schauer, 1976) concluded that underachievement is caused by emotional conflict.

Unfortunately, students who may exhibit emotional and behavioral problems, or who are already labelled as Seriously Emotionally Disordered (SED) are highly unlikely to be identified as gifted (Betts & Niehart, 1988) (See Appendix A for definition of SED). Teachers

and administrators tend to focus on students' weaknesses without nurturing their strengths. Two behavior patterns of this population have been identified by Zabel (1988): some children with emotional problems become aggressive, disruptive, and tend to act out; others become withdrawn, anxious and depressed. Those who are aggressive are more likely to receive attention for this behavior, while their special talents go unnoticed. The ones who withdraw often receive no attention and are more likely to become the underachievers.

Some educators feel they must first deal with a child's emotional problems before they can consider the giftedness. Lieberman (1980) believes that educators should use children's strengths to reach their weaknesses. By focusing on weaknesses without developing strengths, educators fail to promote a realistic self-concept, which is important for both social and emotional development.

On the other hand Davis & Bull (1988) argue that the gifted student is usually excluded from

classification as emotionally disturbed by definition in federal law. Currently no laws exist to protect the rights of a gifted student. To be classified as emotionally disordered, according to the definition given in Public Law 94-142 (Zabel, 1988), the emotional problems must adversely affect educational performance. Chances are that if children are labelled as gifted, their emotional problems are not harming their educational performance strongly enough to warrant concern. So gifted students who have emotional problems may not receive the guidance or counseling they need to reach their potential for succeeding in school.

As a result, these students do not receive the education to which they are entitled to under Public Law 94-142. However, if these children can be called gifted handicapped, then perhaps they might receive the attention they need and deserve. According to Maker, as cited in Grossi (1981), the gifted handicapped refer to:

> persons of outstanding ability or potential who are capable of high performance despite

> handicaps such as visual, hearing or orthopedic impairments, emotional disturbances, or learning disabilities (p.115).

Maker goes on to say that these students require special education programs which go beyond those usually offered and which take into account both their special talents and their handicaps. Grossi (1981) states, "While causes may be many and varied, special consideration should be given to that child's academic curriculum as both a cause and a prevention of a number of emotional problems experienced by intellectually gifted children" (p. 115). Lieberman (1980) believes that a program for handicapped gifted children should exist alongside the regular gifted programs.

These programs should offer experiences that will enhance self-esteem (Lieberman, 1980), as it was noted earlier that self-esteem is important for emotional and social development. The programs should also provide situations in which students of similar ability can interact. All too often gifted students with emotional problems do not develop socially. Lieberman (1980) argues that gifted children need to be with other gifted

children and to work in groups in order to develop social and emotional skills. "A child deficient in social skills and interests is far more likely to respond socially to other kids who share abilities and with whom he can share ideas" (Lieberman, 1980, p. 20).

Besides considering the affective needs of emotionally disordered gifted students, programs for these students must also address cognitive needs. Grossi (1981) cites the negative affects of academic frustration as one reason for a differentiated curriculum. Gifted students who are not challenged academically may develop serious emotional problems. Curriculum compacting has been suggested as a way of creating additional time for nurturing and developing strengths and for remediation of weaknesses (Lieberman, 1980). This involves assessing the skills and content a child already possesses and compacting the curriculum for that possessed knowledge so that the child can move sooner into new curriculum. This is just one of many possibilities that educators of the gifted should consider when working with this special population.

Though double-labelling a child as both gifted and emotionally disordered may be difficult for teachers or parents, it is important not to give up. All children deserve an education that best suits their individual needs. Prior incidences of double-labelling are not common, but this does not mean that it cannot or should not happen. If teachers and parents do not stick up for these children, who will? Certainly these children are not capable of fighting for their own rights alone.

Methods

This is a case study of Bill, a six-year-old boy in the first grade at Wyatt Elementary School.[3] Wyatt Elementary is located in Central Virginia in a suburban area and is a county school. From the school, it is about fifteen minutes into the nearby city. The city is home to a large public university. Education students at the university are often involved in working with the city and county schools.

As an education student, I had the opportunity to student teach in a combined kindergarten-first grade classroom for seven weeks. Bill was a student in this class, so as a researcher I had the advantage of knowing Bill and his work and play habits prior to my research. During the research, I was able to observe Bill four times in one week and for periods ranging from two hours to an entire school day. While observing Bill, I attempted to remain detached from the rest of the class.

This was difficult considering the fact that all of the children knew me and vied for my attention. I explained to them on the days I observed that I would not be able to work with them, but would come back on another day when I would be able to be involved. This worked most of the time and allowed for me to give full attention to Bill.

I took detailed notes of Bill during my observations. The notes attempted to include as much as possible of what he was doing, who he was with, what he said, what he wore, his facial and bodily expressions, and what others said to him.

I also conducted informal interviews with Bill, his regular classroom teacher, and two resource teachers who work with him. These interviews were transcribed from tape and assisted me in drawing conclusions about Bill's gifted potential and his needs for a differentiated curriculum. In my conversation with Bill, I used Joseph Renzulli's Interest-A-Lyzer (1977) as a guide to learn more about Bill's interests. I spoke briefly with his guardian on the phone and will mention her comments and insights in the case study.

Using various sources on identifying gifted students, I compared characteristics of giftedness with those exhibited by Bill in my observations. The sources included The Virginia Plan for the Gifted (1984), and Joanne Rand Whitmore's "Checklist to Identify Gifted Underachievers" (1980). I also used the assessments of Bill's teachers given in their interviews in drawing conclusions about his giftedness. By reading through my field notes and transcripts, I identified recurrent behaviors and characteristics which I then used to compare with definitions and concepts of giftedness mentioned in the above sources, always keeping in mind

the fact that his emotional problems had the potential to mask the gifted behaviors and characteristics.

The following case study is a simple narrative. Its purpose is to describe Bill as well as possible. It will first describe his family background, and previous school experiences leading up to the reseach. Then it will follow a typical day at school for Bill which has been constructed from both participant and non-participant observations, and from interviews. The reader will see how difficult it can be for teachers to recognize a child's strengths when emotional problems and negative behavior patterns occur on a regular basis.

The Case

Family Background

Bill's family background is extremely important because it is the source of his emotional problems. As his student teacher, I was able to learn a lot about the

experiences which led to his aggressiveness and his tendency to act out in class.

Bill was abused by his mother and her boyfriend for several years. He also had a younger sister who died at the age of two from abuse. Bill was three at the time. Such experiences are traumatic for anyone. But for a young child who expects his parents to love him and protect him, the trauma is magnified. To make the situation worse, Bill was blamed by the boyfriend for the death of his sister. Not only is Bill confused by the actions of his mother, but he also carries the burden of guilt for his sister's death, though it has been established that it was not his fault.

After the death of his sister, Bill's mother and her boyfriend were put in jail and Bill was taken in by his paternal grandparents. He has lived with them ever since and has not seen his mother. His father lives nearby but has taken very little interest in his son, much to Bill's dismay.

Bill's grandparents do what they can for Bill. They provide him with a warm home and much love. They have also been able to seek some counseling for Bill.

Bill will occasionally talk about his mother, especially now that he has been going to counseling for several months. More often, he speaks of his father. He talks about the monster truck shows they go to see and the football games they play. His love for his father, and for his mother, is evident when you watch and listen to him talk. But there is also a sadness in his voice and in his eyes.

Previous School Experiences

When I began student teaching, I learned a lot about Bill from his teacher, Mrs. Hall. It was obvious that he was a real discipline problem. He had a tendency to act out and become aggressive if something "set him off." That something might be not wanting to do what the rest of the class was doing, or not helping at clean up time for which he was told he would lose some of his recess time later.

Recess is an important part of school to Bill. Mrs. Hall has tried to use it both negatively and positively to modify his behavior and to try to get him to begin to take

responsibility for his actions. Sometimes these efforts worked and sometimes they did not. Bill had his good days and his bad days like anyone else, only his were extremes. The time that Bill took away from the rest of the class when he would have an emotional outburst was one of the most difficult parts of having him in class.

Whenever Bill had an outburst, it would take several minutes, sometimes up to fifteen, for him to calm down. For about the first five minutes someone would have to hold him, his arms and his legs so that he would not hurt someone or himself, or destroy school property. But when it was over, he would always apologize and be very affectionate with his teachers. Many times Mrs. Hall had to request assistance from the principal's office to take him out of the room because his behavior was so extreme and often endangered the other students.

In terms of his academic achievements up until the case study, Bill was assessed as an average student. Much of the time he was unable to do the work that the

rest of the class was doing because of his emotional outbursts. If he was in a good mood, then he could do the work, if he wanted, and do it accurately. Bill was fortunate to have had Mrs. Hall for two consecutive years as she was his kindergarten teacher the previous year. This year the kindergarten and first grade classes were combined and Bill was one of the several students to be with her for a second year. His fortune lay in the fact that she knew his family background and was aware of his problems and his abilities. She has been very patient with Bill and has not stopped believing in him or trying to help him.

Several months into the year, Mrs. Hall became very concerned about Bill and knew that she could no longer handle his outbursts in her class. She recommended him for child study. Child study refers to a set of assessments done on children who are having problems functioning in the classroom. The assessments are done by several people and attempt to look at all aspects of a student, not only the problems for which the child was referred.

As I began my research three months later, Bill was just beginning to undergo Child Study assessments for his emotional problems. He had also just been put on Ritalin by a psychiatrist outside of school in an attempt to control his hyperactive behavior, and hopefully to help him control his emotions. From my observations, I noticed a significant change in his behavior from when I had last seen him.

Many different approaches have been taken with Bill to help him take responsibility for his behavior. As was mentioned earlier, recess was used negatively and positively with Bill at the beginning of the year. In January, Mrs. Hall decided to try a new approach and she is currently using a smiley chart with Bill. Everytime that he gets through some part of the day, approximately every fifteen minutes, without an outburst, he is given a smiley face on the chart that he carries. When he gets five faces, then he is given ten minutes to spend in the resource room working on games, puzzles, or the computer. This is done in cooperation with the resource teachers, Mrs. Madden and Mrs. Garland.

The resource room is being used in his case not for remediating a specific, identified disability as it might normally be used. For Bill, the varied activities available in the resource room act as an incentive to help him control his emotions and behavior. During these times, he is expected to come into the room quietly, so as not to disrupt the students who are there for specific remediation. Bill really seems to enjoy this and it has been relatively successful in helping him control his behavior.

Bill At School

When I walk into Bill's classroom, I am struck by the noise level. It is easy to forget how much young children talk. I am greeted by Bill with a shy smile and a hello. Bill is wearing a grey, long-sleeved shirt, a pair of black pants and some sneakers. You might say he looks just as you would imagine a first grader to look.

His day begins quietly, mostly due to the fact that he takes Ritalin in the morning before he comes to school. This is one of the noticeable changes mentioned above.

The students enjoy free-play in the morning, with blocks, housekeeping, reading, and games as activities from which to choose. There are not desks in this classroom for all the students. The work they do is done in small groups at round tables, or in a large group on the floor at the front of the room.

When all of the students have arrived, they are called to sit in a circle for calendar. Bill comes and sits quietly on the floor and receives a smiley face on his chart. As the children gather, Mrs. Hall has a record playing a song about dinosaurs, the current unit of study. Bill complains that he cannot hear it. Mrs. Hall is always tuned in to Bill's voice and subsequently she turns the volume up. He sings with the rest of the class, though sometimes he stops and listens to the other children, while he plays with the snap on the pocket of his pants.

Throughout calendar time Bill interjects comments. While other children might be reminded to sit down and raise their hands if they have something to say, Bill usually receives no reminder. If he gets carried away and his voice gets loud, then Mrs. Hall might reprimand him. Since it is still morning, and Bill is more subdued, this is not really a problem.

Following the calendar, the students have reading workshop. Each student has a tub in which several books are placed. During this time they take the books and read somewhere quietly, either alone or with another student or parent volunteer. Mrs. Hall walks around and reads with different children each day.

I watched Bill as he read. His face was very solemn and his voice was quiet. When he was finished, he told me that he could not read any of the other books because they were too hard. From talking with Mrs. Hall, I knew that they were not. She said, "He doesn't like to read a whole lot. If given a choice, he'd rather play." But he is quite capable of reading and reads at a first and possibly a second grade level. He gives up quickly, though, if he has trouble with some of the words.

Bill told me that he never reads at home. However, Bill's grandmother told me that he reads a lot at home. Everyday in school he goes to the library to return one book or magazine and check out another. The librarian informed me that he taught himself to use the library's computer to look up books in which he is interested. He also teaches other students how to use it. Mostly he checks out books about cars and trucks and karate, and Sports Illustrated magazine. Cars and trucks are his favorite things, particularly monster trucks, which are big trucks with super-sized tires that run over cars for show. While it is possible that Bill is reading at home, the material that he usually checks out from the library is more advanced than his abilities. It is likely that he spends more time looking at the pictures in the books than actually reading them.

While Bill usually only talks, reads, and writes about monster trucks and racing cars, I was able to get at some other interests through Renzulli's Interest-A-Lyzer (1977). These interests include astronomy and

board games. Knowing these other interests could be helpful to Bill's teachers in planning activities and curriculum for him.

His writing skills parallel his reading skills. He is able to spell many words, probably more than the average first grader, and his handwriting is neat. He often uses capitalization and punctuation and can use it correctly. Mrs. Hall indicated that his problem is that he does not like to write more than one or two sentences. She is working with him on elaborating when he writes for writing workshop. As with reading, his attention span for writing is short.

On a good day, Bill receives his five smiley faces quickly. It is easy to see that he is excited and happy about going to the resource room because his face wears a smile and he usually skips out of the class and down the hall. Before he leaves though, he often hugs Mrs. Hall. In fact, he hugs Mrs. Hall frequently throughout the day.

When I walked into the resource room, Bill was playing on the floor with a puzzle. Mrs. Madden and Mrs.

Garland were working with other students who are there for specific academic problems. Someone was at the computer, otherwise Bill would have certainly been there. Both resource teachers told me in separate conversations that Bill loves the computer but will not go over to play with another student who is already there. He will wait and wait for that person to finish, even if it means that during a given ten minutes he never gets the opportunity to play on it.

I asked if he ever plays with other students when he comes to the resource room and Mrs. Garland, who works more with Bill, said that he does not. "When he comes in he likes to play alone. No, I take that back. He comes up and he'll ask me if I'll play with him, if I'll play a game with him, if I'll do something with him. And I usually suggest that he ask one of the other kids. Very seldom, he once in a while will."

This is a very different response from the one Mrs. Hall gave me to the same question. She said Bill seems to be the leader in the class. "Well, he has lots of

friends. He's a very sociable little boy. And he can be very loving and friendly and nice to them. But then he also likes to have his own way, and tends to boss the other children around a lot." For the most part they do not seem to mind; they are willing to go along with what he wants. On the computer, he is usually the one playing it or controlling it, but there are always other students around, watching him and encouraging him. If they try to play, too, he gets upset and tells them to stop.

As Bill plays on the computer, or as he reads or writes by himself, you can hear him from time to time making noises, or laughing out loud. Sometimes he will say a few words, but most of the time it's only noise or laughing. All of his teachers have noticed this, though they seem to have learned to block it out. The other students also seem to ignore this behavior, especially when it happens during large group time. This behavior is not a recent development or a side effect of the Ritalin, but has been occurring all year.

Back in the classroom, after reading workshop, the students work in small groups with Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Dunn, the assistant teacher, or have free-choice, which includes the same things as in the morning, but also art, snack and computer.

When working with Mrs. Dunn, Bill talks a lot with the other students. If he does not want to do a particular day's activity, it is very difficult to get him to work. He will avoid the area or think of excuses to get away. If you can get him to sit at the table, he will bother the other students and then they all get in trouble for being loud and silly.

During this time, Bill usually goes to the library, plays on the computer or plays in blocks or housekeeping with several of the other boys in the class or with one girl that is his "girlfriend." He never chooses to read or write. This is the time when his energy begins to increase. His voice is audible above all the other voices, and he often has to be reminded to talk quietly or be restrained from running around the classroom.

Another problem with this time for Bill is that he forgets to eat snack unless he is reminded. It is only when the time comes to clean up and the snack is being put away that he remembers. But then it is too late. This is upsetting to him. He got very angry one day about this and Mrs. Hall had to take him out into the hallway so as not to disturb the other children. She was only able to do this after he ran away from her tauntingly, with a look on his face that seemed to say, "You can't catch me!" Mrs. Hall was ready to get the red card, which is used to have someone from the office come and remove Bill. But when she took him out into the hallway, he calmed down and was able to return to the room after a minute. He did not return with a smile, but with a frown and would not help the class clean the room. However, he did not cause any more problems and just walked around the room, with his hands in his pockets and waited for the next activity.

After this period of time, the students have math time. Mrs. Hall splits the students into groups who work with her or with a specific math game. The rest of

the students choose from math tubs. Math is one of Bill's favorite things, his most favorite of all the "academics." During the afternoon, he goes to work with Mrs. Garland on math with two other first grade boys. Frequently, Bill misses math in Mrs. Hall's room because he goes to see the school counselor during this time. When he is in the classroom for math, he enjoys playing the games, but not the tubs. The games involve counting, adding, and subtracting, all of which he can do well.

In the resource room, he does worksheets with Mrs. Garland for thirty minutes. These are his favorite of all math activities. His attention span is a lot longer during this time. In fact, he was attentive for the entire thirty minutes, whereas during other times he might usually only pay attention for ten or fifteen minutes. I was amazed to see him concentrate so hard on the sheets. He uses a number of strategies to answer the problems.

The two other boys in the group are twins who, although they are very bright, are in the resource room because they are developmentally delayed. Because they are so bright, they work very fast and finish quickly. Bill

did not seem upset by this, nor distracted from his own work when I observed him. Though he sometimes might ask them to wait up for him, he did not seem to get frustrated. Mrs. Garland said, "He's very eager to learn. I have noticed, however, that when he's working with James and Mark, he sometimes gets a little frustrated if he can't keep up with them." Yet it seems that this has not kept him from wanting to learn or from continuing to work with the twins. In this math group is where his strengths seem to shine.

Bill's work with Mrs. Garland and the time he spends in the resource room are very different from that in his regular classroom. Though Mrs. Madden does not work directly with Bill, as the head resource teacher she is aware of his presence and his behaviors during the times that he is in her room. In talking with her, I found that her comments were very similar to those of Mrs. Garland. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hall has not seen the behaviors that Mrs. Madden and Mrs. Garland see. She has not seen the look of concentration on Bill's face as he works through some math problems, nor the attentive,

yet quiet and still mood that seems to govern Bill while he is in the resource room. They, on the other hand, have not seen the anger and frustration that Mrs. Hall sees.

The students have physical education everyday at 11:30. This is another time that Bill seems to enjoy, if he can control his excitement and do the activities as directed. When I watched him there, he smiled a lot. He also concentrated on the task at hand and was happy when he did it well. One day he was hitting balls with a hockey stick into the center of the circle where there were objects to be hit. If he hit an object, he would exclaim, "Yeah!" But if he missed, he got frustrated, would frown and stomp his foot. Most of the time he was able to hit something.

During the twenty minutes between P.E. and lunch, the students gather in a large circle on the floor. Generally this is a time for music. This is one of the most difficult times for Bill. The Ritalin has worn off and he has trouble sitting still. Usually he sits next to Mrs. Hall. Often during large group times like these he will interrupt Mrs. Hall by speaking out or by standing

next to her with his arm around her shoulder and whispering in her ear. Sometimes he sits on her lap. He is easier to control and less likely to get upset when he is near her. However, if he is sitting next to some friends, he will play with them, horse around or talk incessantly. His behavior becomes disruptive and Mrs. Hall has to stop frequently to reprimand him.

Before lunch, Bill has to stop in the office to take more Ritalin. Lunch is usually uneventful as he eats quickly in order to go to the resource room as soon as possible. This is very different from when I student taught. Lunch used to be a difficult time. Bill would be very silly and would often get in trouble and sometimes have to be sent to the office.

In the resource room he plays by himself until the twins arrive at 1:00 to start math. It was during this after lunch time that Mrs. Garland discovered Bill's liking for math. He saw the twins doing the worksheets and wanted to do them too. That was when Bill joined the twins regularly for math. It works out well because he does miss math with Mrs. Hall frequently because of his visits with the counselor. Sometimes if the group

before Bill's group finishes early, Mrs. Madden will let him start math before the twins arrive. She said he is always anxious to get started.

Back in the classroom again, Bill joins the rest of the class in silent reading or writing workshop. Depending on the day and the amount of time he spent at the resource room, he sometimes does not have much time for these activities before the children go outside for recess.

Recess, Bill will tell you, is his favorite part of school. Mrs. Hall said he has begun to play more with the other children during this time. It used to be that Bill would swing by himself during most of recess. Now Bill plays football with six or seven other boys. Although I could not hear what they were saying, Bill seemed to be the one directing the game. He was the one with the ball at the start of a new play, or else he would decide who to give it to for the start. The other boys never complained about him. He smiled a lot during this time.

After recess, the students gather their belongings to go home. Papers are passed out and students are allowed to get a drink of water at the sink. Bill is more

energetic again, probably as a combined result of the Ritalin wearing off and recess. But he is not as loud as he is at other times of the day. He likes to walk with Mrs. Hall as she takes the students to catch their buses.

Summary and Conclusions

From watching Bill in various settings within his school, from talking with his teachers, and from having taught him myself for a short time, I have learned a great deal about this young boy. Bill is a child who, partly because of his experiences with the adults in his life, is very perceptive. He is able to take in what goes on around him and understand the role he plays, both with other classmates, and with his teachers. He may not always be willing to play the roles expected of him, but in communicating with him, it is obvious that he understands the expectations.

Bill is also a child who is still hurting from the wounds of his parents. He longs for attention,

acceptance, and love. However, he is not yet capable of expressing those emotions in an accepted way. Instead, he uses a variety of other techniques to get the attention he greatly desires. With his peers, he becomes the leader. Taking control of the situation, he does not allow for others to push him out or make him feel not wanted. He is fortunate that his tendency to boss the other children has not harmed his relationships with them. However, this may not continue to hold true. This tendency is something of which Bill's teachers need to be aware, and they need to watch out for its future impact.

In Mrs. Hall's class, Bill has learned to take control of the situation in another way. He knows that he cannot boss Mrs. Hall around like he does his friends. However, he has perceived, and correctly so, that Mrs. Hall will listen or pay attention to him if he uses one of several different means. First, she will listen to him when he is calm, when he is affectionate, when he seems almost withdrawn and shy. He also knows that he can interrupt her during most any activity if he is in this calm, affectionate "frame of mind." This technique does not

work for the other children in his class. But Bill has a special place in Mrs. Hall's heart, and she honestly desires to help him.

Secondly, he has learned to gain attention through antisocial means. For instance, being loud, aggressive and uncooperative. Mrs. Hall cannot ignore his behavior when it becomes a danger to her class. While these instances seem to have decreased considerably since the fall, Bill still knows that, as a last resort, this is one way to secure attention.

Lastly, Bill knows that he can get attention by being cooperative, by participating in class with the other children and as they do, by raising his hand if he wants to talk, listening and sitting quietly, and following directions. This is the most positive form of attention-getting behavior that Bill exhibits and this is what his teachers need to focus on and reinforce.

Bill is also aware of his limits in the resource room. He knows that he has special privileges that the other children in his class do not. He also knows that if he abuses these privileges, he may not be allowed to

go there any more. It is here that one glimpses Bill's true potential. He is not always trying to be in control or to gain attention. He does not have to interact with other children if that is what he chooses. He is, however, in control of his emotions and his behavior. He uses both to help himself, to think, and to learn.

While Bill has been described by his teachers as both social and non-social, it seems to me that he is somewhere in between. I do think that Bill fears rejection by his peers, and where he is forced to interact with them, he has learned to cope by being domineering. When left on his own, as in the resource room, he chooses not to play with the other children. I think that this is healthy for Bill because it gives him a chance to be alone without fearing being alone. It is a safe place for Bill.

Bill needs continued support from his teachers and grandparents. He also needs to continue counseling to work completely through his feelings of confusion and guilt, and through his insecurities. If this is not continued, Bill will continue to have aggressive and hostile outbursts. While the medication he is on

has helped to reduce the number of such incidences, it should not be used as a crutch either by Bill, his grandparents, or his teachers. Ritalin works to control physical and physiological reactions, but it does not help Bill to deal with his emotional problems, which can be seen as the root of his behavioral problems.

His ability to concentrate so intensely on mathematical concepts and his advanced ability to communicate with others his age and with adults are indications, that while he may not be extremely gifted, he certainly is capable of working at or slightly above grade level in most or several academic areas. It may also be the case that his emotional problems have prevented him from advancing further academically than he has at this point. One example of this was given to me by Mrs. Hall.

In January, while doing assessments of all the students spelling abilities, she inadvertently did the same assessment activity twice with Bill. When she realized this, she noted comparisons of his performance

on the two different days. On the first, she remembered him as having been in a bad mood, very uncooperative. On this assessment, he did poorly. Most of what he wrote were scribble marks and random letters. He spelled only a few, very simple words. However, the second time he was cooperative and did extremely well, lining up his columns of words and spelling many words accurately in neat handwriting.

From this, it is easy to see how hard it can be for a teacher to evaluate an emotionally disordered student's academic performance, and even harder to find gifted potential. There is little time during the day and during the year to make sure that you catch such children on a good day. However, the ramifications of any one student being assessed on a bad day are motivating for teachers. If children are to receive the education that they deserve, an education that meets their individual needs, teachers need to be aware of the many factors that can influence a child's behavior and learning.

Bill has a lot going for him. His grandparents love him and want to provide as best they can for his needs. His teachers like him and have taken a special interest in his life. He is bright and is receiving some instruction that capitalizes on his academic strengths. Counseling can continue to provide the emotional release he needs and can help him to work through his problems and take full control of his emotions and his behavior. With a little more time, love, and effort, Bill is on his way to living a full and rewarding life.

Other students may not be so lucky. Sometimes it is up to teachers to recognize the warning signals children emit, and to provide assistance with emotional and behavioral problems. It is also their responsibility to seek out children's strengths, and to provide instruction and experiences that will develop these strengths to their fullest. Only by nurturing our students' strengths, while helping them strengthen their weaknesses, can we fulfill our responsibility as educators.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The term "giftedness" is used here to indicate specific academic abilities and refers to the noun form of the work gifted.

[2]The term "emotional disorder" will be used henceforth to refer to either emotional or behavioral disorders as it has been suggested that the two refer to the same problems and behaviors.

[3]All names have been changed to insure confidentiality.

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Appendix A

According to Public Law 94-142, as cited in Zabel (1988), SED is defined as:

> a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:
> - an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;
> - an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
> - inappropriate types of behavior or feeling under normal circumstances;
> - a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression;
> - a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.